

## Looking Beyond “Good People” and “Bad People”

April 23, 2021 Scott Gunn

*For several days [Saul] was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” —Acts 9:19b-20*

Believing that there are “good people” and “bad people” is a fallacy of many modern Christians. It might seem convenient to us to divide the world this way, but that doesn’t seem to be how God sees things. The Bible is full of examples of people who committed terrible sins and yet who were chosen as instruments of God’s work in the world.

On the one hand, we are all good because God made us in God’s own image. On the other hand, we are all bad because we are fallen humans, people who fall into sin again and again. The unfailing message of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, if we but repent and turn to the Lord.

Saul did awful things as he persecuted the followers of Jesus. Yet through a series of dazzling events, Saul was converted. He went from being a zealous persecutor of Christians to being a zealous proclaimer of Jesus Christ.

Imagine if Ananias and the other disciples had refused to make way for Saul’s repentance? They might have “canceled” him for his evil deeds. Instead, they were faithful to God’s word and God’s will, and they knew that God could transform death to life, evil to good, hatred to love. Now, Saul, for his part, was willing to repent. He sought no shortcuts in his life, and again and again he told his own story as a way of encouraging others to be willing to repent.

Think about this story in the context of today’s news. Sometimes we are quick to “cancel” people who make mistakes. But, also, sometimes public figures want grace without repentance. Cancellation and consequences are different. Those who are truly ready to repent will not seek shortcuts in their journey to acknowledge their faults and to make amends.

We who follow Jesus should be ready to extend grace to those who repent. We who follow Jesus should also be willing to speak the truth about injustice when we see it and to call others to turn away from evil and toward goodness.

Saul is a wonderful example for us. He committed terrible deeds. From his letters, we certainly get the sense that he is a complicated person at best and sometimes a jerk at worst. And yet through his leadership, the church flourished.

We must never expect moral perfection in ourselves or in others. But we must always be ready to repent and return to the Lord and to invite others to do the same. Thanks be to God, Jesus always offers another chance.